



International community engagement: Connection to self, place, and profession

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Summary

This project describes the connected learning experience of 14 physical therapy students who participated in a year-long capstone international service-learning (ISL) experience. Specifically, this mixed-method study examined the students' cultural competence, professional role formation, and personal development resulting from international study abroad. Evaluation of students' experience included: Cultural Competence survey, focus groups, reflective papers, and community feedback.

During the 2011-2012 academic year, students conducted preliminary research on the Ecuadorian health care system and culture. Over spring break in March 2012, the students and researcher traveled to Quito and Latacunga, Ecuador, to provide PT services for the For His Children (FHC) orphanage. As part of the researcher's sustained relationship with FHC, the researcher conducted a needs assessment of the served population prior to the visit. The needs assessment enabled targeted PT interventions. Students were able to research the neurological and orthopedic disorders affecting the served children and design sustainable PT interventions.

The impact of the ISL experience was evaluated by the administration of the Process for Cultural

Competence Among Health Care Professions Student Version survey (IAPCC-SV) pre and post travel, and all students in the study demonstrated a statistically significant ($p = .001$) change. Post-travel focus group data, and reflective papers were also examined and four dominant categories emerged: Advocacy; Cultural Knowledge; Career Definition; Connection between the Classroom and Field.

Our curricular model enabled students to connect with a community and a culture. Through reflection, they were able to articulate a connection between their learning in the domains of core professional values, cultural competence, and solidify personal career interests for working with pediatrics and internationally with underserved populations. Curricular models that provide meaningful connections between the classroom and the community are important for the development of a work force prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

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